

## COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The public portion of the brief address given to the combined  
faculty and staff of BYU's CFA&C on August 24, 2005  
by

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I am flooded with memories, dear brothers and sisters, standing here where, in 1973, I was appointed Dean of this college by President Dallin Oaks. I'm now 78. I retired in 1992. During these 13 years since I have mused about things College of Fine Arts and Communications. I love it and you. But what is this college? What shapes its content and form? And especially, how may it improve? I do not prescribe for you, as though I know something you don't. I will only testify, hoping that some of my experiences and views will enrich you and your work as they do me and mine.

I distilled some personal answers, *personal* answers, to those questions from this unique experience. Fifty years ago I watched and worked with Bill Demos as he designed a film setting for an opulent garden described in the Pearl of Great Price [Moses 3:15].

Bill worked from concept to expression, from idea to its sensuous expression [Hegel]. He considered the "French garden" as a model, wherein lines, heights, and even colors conform to a rigid intellectual design. But after prayerful study, and with the collaboration of the production team, he chose the "English Garden" as his model—a strategy where there are no straight lines, where everything blossoms as it will. Bill died several years ago, but his imperishable legacy, that image, that garden, is fixed in the mind of every Latter-day Saint in the world who has seen it! Such is the astonishing and boundless power of the constructs of beauty that define the unique stewardship of this college

This is my core belief, this is my testimony. The implements of beauty are the sublime and holy responsibility of the people in this room. I do not say we own them. But I know that I as a Latter-day Saint am responsible for their holy use to help bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of God's family. If, as the scriptures and our prophets say, my, Lael's, transcendent purpose in life is to build the Kingdom, to manifest beauty—perfection—as a metaphor for God, I bear a divine responsibility to bring all that I do, every aspect of my life, to the standard of beauty.

I do not mean pretty, fashionable, or didactic. I loath such feeble standards and deny their pertinence to art. I mean the truth that Keats found in

beauty--the truth that derives from a perfect correspondence between a conception and its expression--the truth that promises happiness. Therefore nothing--one's work, one's marriage, one's mind--is absolutely right until it is beautiful.

That *beauty* is an analog, a metaphor for God, is emphasized by our Church leaders. Joseph Smith said explicitly that beauty comes from God [*Teachings* 251]. Heber C. Kimball said "angels will not dwell with us until [we are living in beauty]" [*Journal of Discourses* v.8, 243-244]. Beauty should and can be the goal of every teacher and student in our college, whether a stage hand, piano tuner, chemist, administrator, potter, writer, speaker, printer, editor, or composer.

Indeed, beauty ought to be the standard for everyone, not artists only. As an example from science, my physiology teacher at USU taught me as a freshman the *universal* pertinence of beauty. He was a young man, perhaps a graduate student, who was simply besotted by the human body. He sketched its details with colored chalk, taught us the names, traced the astonishing labyrinth of the urinary system, *conneked the leg bone to the ankle bone*, and sent us from class awed by our magnificent structure. He was not LDS; he never once mentioned God. But I left class feeling closer to God, astonished and humbled by God's peerless creativity. I don't now remember his name, a Mr. Bowen, perhaps. But I cherish his legacy: his beautiful, truthful explication of the human machine. He built the Kingdom as ought every scientist, carpenter, teacher, sound engineer, or journalist. As Martin Luther said, "Even a dairymaid can milk cows to the glory of God." If she can, can't I act, paint, or teach a class to that same glory?

My theatre art does not excel at framing explicit solutions. But there is absolutely no better medium, none, than theatre--staged or televised--for nurturing our own solutions to the awesome, eternity-changing questions that impinge on celestial life. How do we resolve a conflict where God mandates one action, and the state mandates another? How do we *decide* when the answer to both conflicting questions is "Yes?" Abortion, for example, or same-sex marriage. Think *Antigone*! Think Eve and the apple! (When I become president of BYU I will require every freshman to attend a live performance of *Antigone*--every semester! And *A Doll's House* on the day of his marriage--a matinee, of course.) Our leaders deplore pride; *Oedipus and Lear* show pride's actual destruction of two truly great men. How does impurity destroy a father? Think *Death of A Salesman*. As a Latter-day Saint theatre artist, and a son of God, I am divinely mandated to build the Kingdom, the arts of theatre are my means, and beauty is my standard.

You and I were foreordained, as Mosiah 13 says, to serve as high priests and custodians of the priesthood. I believe that we in this hall were also blessed and empowered there to manipulate those sacred instruments that reveal God to man. When President Hinckley writes, as he did in the *Ensign*, that the light in temple sealing rooms is bright because light reveals God--is a metaphor for God--he is speaking obliquely to us, we who know best the artful use and effect of light in all its manifestations, that light and life and spirit are one—the particles from which worlds are made. Margaret and I treasure our large painting by Franz Johanson entitled *Shining Mountain* wherein he presents the rich and other-worldly luminous colors his inspired eye sees from high above Mt. Timpanogos. When the D&C (93:35) says that "The elements are the Tabernacle of God," Dean Stephen Jones in his phenomenal, beautiful *attheexactestpoint* composition instructs the world how to mine, explore, and recombine the inexhaustible treasures of time, tone, timbre, and silence to reveal the elements that tabernacle God. When Nephi says in 2 Nephi 33:1 that speech is superior to writing because it is the unique agent of the Holy Ghost, I rejoice that the principles of the holy faculty of communication are pondered and shaped in our college.

I am happy. Beloved Margaret is still with me. I enjoy retirement. And my eternal career as an artist continues. Because our arts are the preeminent medium for embodying the holy ordinances of exaltation, they may one day support the ordinances of resurrection and godhood. Perhaps one day, despite the modestly of my talent, I will receive a-- a *spiritgram* that says "Hey, brother Lael. Come over to cloud nine and talk to us. We're starting another project, and you might be able to help." If they do, I will.

And so will you.